

A CENTRAL QUEENSLAND WOMBAT.

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(Plate XXVI.)

In July, 1937, a single specimen of a large male wombat was collected for the Queensland Museum by Messrs. Charles and H. Greensill Barnard at Epping Forest Station, 75 miles west of Clermont. Special collecting trips were undertaken by these naturalists, who had heard of the existence of large wombat-like animals in that district.

Although these marsupials were widely distributed in Queensland in the Pleistocene and two present-day species were known to occur sparingly in southern parts of the State, it was somewhat surprising to have definite evidence of living wombats in a locality in central Queensland. This extends their range by over 400 miles.

This Epping Forest wombat is obviously of the *latifrons-gillespiei* type, generically designated as *Lasiorhinus*. It is here described as a new subspecies—*Lasiorhinus latifrons barnardi*.

Description.—The pelt, which was received with a complete skull and limb bones, is slightly over four feet in maximum length (Reg. No. 6239). The texture of the fur is somewhat silky as in *latifrons* and *gillespiei*. The rhinarium is completely clothed with short, close hairs. The ears are of the elongated type (incomplete in this pelt), being over 60 mm. in length.

General dorsal colour brown, but mottled with grey, interspersed here and there with entirely black hairs. Basal portion of dorsal hairs dark brown. Rhinarium hairs brown. Tufts of white hairs around the outside of the ears. Outside of ears well haired, but inside sparsely clothed. Ventral surface dirty grey, gradually merging into dorsal colour. Basal portion of ventral hairs dark brown. Feet dark brown. Tail scantily clothed with short dark hairs. Long black hairs are prominent on either side of the sacral region, in the median area of which the hairs are very thick and tufted. Average length of body hairs 25 mm.

Crania.—The skull associated with the pelt has a maximum length of 191 mm. and a basal length of 172 mm. The breadth across the zygomatic arches is 156. The nasals have a length of 77 and a combined breadth at maximum of 67. The length of the palate is 113. The upper molar series, which is well worn, has a length of 57.5 mm. The skull is evidently that of a fully mature wombat. The post-orbital processes, typical of *Lasiorhinus*, are very rugose and this characteristic also applies

to the region over the orbits, the lachrymal, and the maxillary area adjoining the nasals. There is a slight anterior projection of the frontals in the median line between the nasals. A prominent projecting knob or nasal spine (bifid) is present on the premaxillaries. The lachrymal has a prominent tubercle. The parietal platform is broad. The anterior nares are widely open at their lateral borders, as in typical *latifrons* and the *gillespiei* crania. The anterior edge of each premaxillary is more or less vertical in lateral aspect where it joins the nasals, and there is no anterior projection of the superior border as in *mitchelli*. The relatively wide nasals form practically the whole of the nasal roof.

The lower contours of the mandible are markedly convex, as in typical *latifrons*. The length of the symphysis with incisors (84 mm.), exceeds one half of the maximum length of the mandible (154 mm.). The length of the mandibular molar series is 55 mm.

In comparison with the records given by Spencer and Kershaw (1910), the actual dimensions of the skull and the length of the molar series are exceptionally large for an existing wombat.

A second incomplete large skull (No. 6240) was also found near the burrows.

In October, 1937, two additional crania were obtained in the same locality by Messrs. Barnard (Reg. No. 6283-6284). One of these exhibits such a condition of asymmetry that opportunity is taken to illustrate it (Plate XXVI). Evidently development of the left side of the skull was stunted in early life, probably due to hemiplegia. This is markedly shown by the dimensions of the molar series; that of the right side is 55 mm., whereas the left series only attains 48. The molar series is well worn and the individual evidently lived to maturity. Pathological conditions such as these are apparently very rare among marsupials.

Affinities.—In his comprehensive description of "A New Species of Hairy-nosed Wombat," the late C. W. De Vis¹ recognised the affinities of his *Phascolomys gillespiei* from the Moonie River, south-western Queensland, with the South Australian *latifrons*, but considered that certain cranial characteristics entitled it to specific distinction. Baldwin Spencer and Kershaw, however, in their review of "The Existing Species of the Genus *Phascolomys*" (p. 65)² refer to the wide range of *latifrons* and express considerable doubt as to whether De Vis' species is specifically distinct from *P. latifrons*. Iredale and Troughton in their Check List of Australian Mammals (1934) give a generic name "Wombatula" for De Vis' species, but this was done without autoptic examination and no diagnosis was recorded.³

¹ De Vis, C. W. Annals of the Queensland Museum, No. 5, 1900.

² Baldwin Spencer & J. A. Kershaw. Mem. Nat. Mus., Melb. No. 3, 1910.

³ Iredale & Troughton, Memoir VI, Austr. Mus. Sydney, 1934.

In his excellent descriptions of the Common and of the Hairy-nosed Wombats, Wood Jones adopts Gray's genus *Lasiorhinus* (1863) for the characteristic South Australian *latifrons* and notes its wide range.⁴ The significant structural differences between *latifrons* and *mitchelli* warrant generic distinction.

It is of interest to note that whilst the common naked-nosed wombat was first recorded by Owen from fossil remains and subsequently found as an existing species, the living *latifrons* type has now, conversely, a wider range through records of fossils. Mandibular fragments from the Wellington Valley, New South Wales, were recorded by Owen as *P. latifrons*.

A fairly complete fossil cranium of the *latifrons* type was received in 1917 from Clermont through Mr. Power, Warden of the Mines Department, who thought that it came from Cotherstone, some 35 miles east of Clermont. In this cranium the length of the molar series is 53 mm. and the width of the hind lobe of the second molar is 10.5. This cranium, which is very definitely fossilised, is registered as F. 1279 in our series.

Another fossil skull with mandible attached and with several associated limb-bones, vertebrae and pelvic fragments was found during the excavation of a well at Glengallen Plains, Darling Downs, in 1936. This skull is registered as *L. latifrons* (F. 2526).

Obviously the correct status of existing species of wombats should be considered in association with some of the fossil species, such as *P. krefftii* Owen (1872), *P. medius* Owen (1872) and *thomsoni* Owen (1872). In the paper in which he described *P. angustidens*, De Vis considered that *P. mitchelli* was really distinct from the existing species.⁵

L. Glauert's *P. hacketti* from Western Australia⁶ is allied to *P. mitchelli*.

In his Catalogue of Fossil Mammals (1887)⁷ R. Lydekker treated Owen's *mitchelli* and *platyrhinus* as distinct species, but in his Handbook to the Marsupialia (1896)⁸ he placed *platyrhinus* as a synonym (p. 125).

Owing to the paucity of significant material, the writer has diffidence in attempting a comprehensive revision of the several names that have been given to fossil fragments of wombats. It is evident that these marsupials had a far wider range in the past and that they were decidedly variable. In records of the total length of the molar series in adult crania variations of several millimetres were given by Spencer and Kershaw for both *mitchelli* and *latifrons*.

⁴ Wood Jones, The Mammals of South Australia, Pt. II, 1924.

⁵ De Vis, C. W. Pr. Linn. Soc. N.S.W., VI, 1891.

⁶ Glauert, L. Rec. West. Aus. Mus. Vol. I, 1910.

⁷ Lydekker, R. Catal. Foss. Mamm. Brit. Mus. Pt. V, 1887.

⁸ Lydekker, R. Handbook to the Marsupialia, Lloyd's Nat. Hist, 1896.

In the total length of their molar series the new Epping Forest crania are distinctly larger than those of *latifrons* and even of *mitchelli*, but they are much smaller than *P. medius*. Their general facies, however, is so obviously with *L. latifrons* that until additional material is forthcoming it seems best to regard these central Queensland wombats only as a new sub-species.

LASIORHINUS LATIFRONS BARNARDI.

This new sub-species as described above is based mainly on its larger size. As in typical *latifrons* the frontals project slightly between the nasals, whereas in *gillespiei* the nasals project posteriorly into the frontal region. As there is considerable variation in this region it is doubtful whether much significance should be attached to minor deviations of sutures.

The infraorbital foramen is circular or sub-oval, as in *gillespiei* and typical *latifrons*, and not laterally compressed as in *mitchelli*.

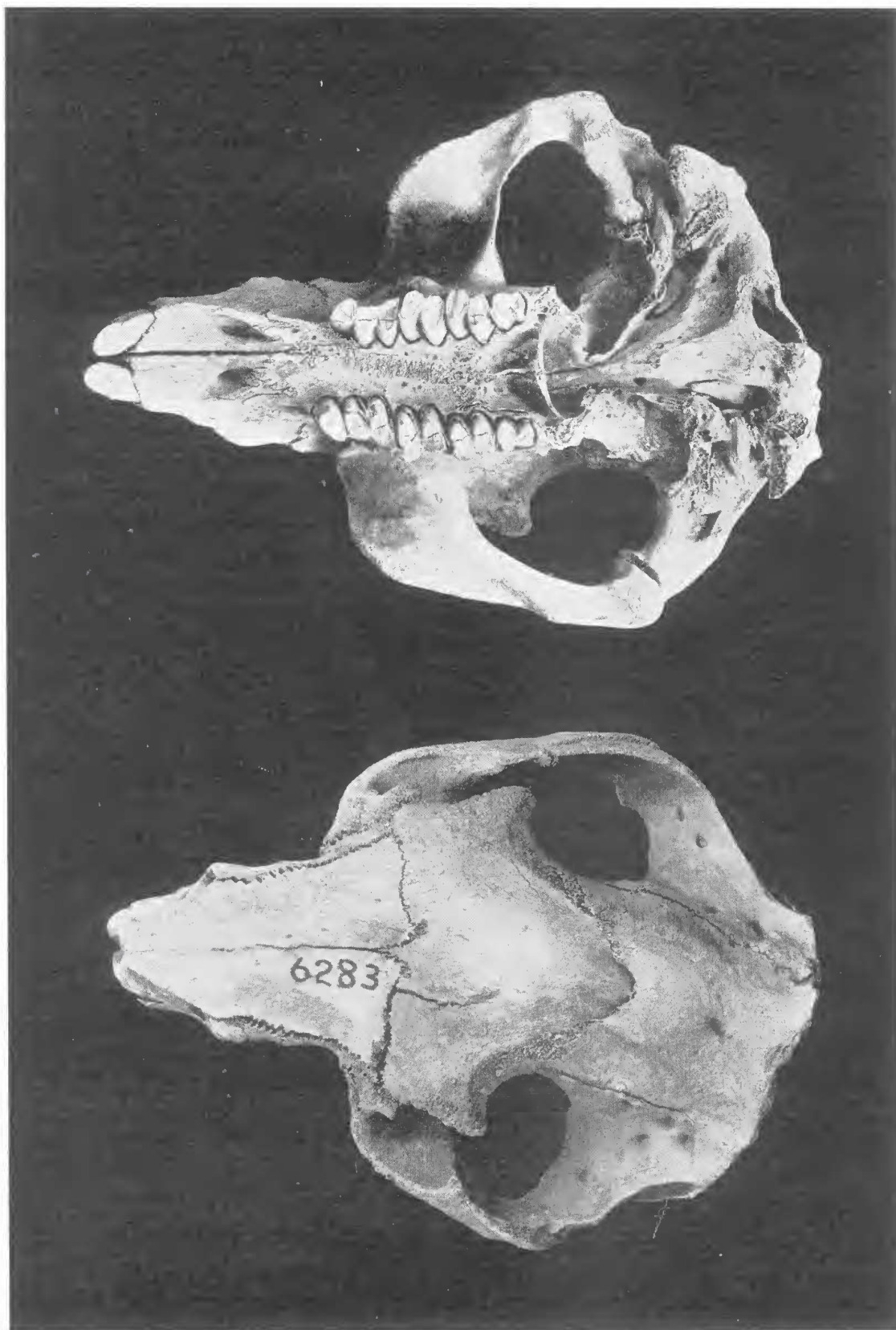
Messrs. Barnard record that the total length of the animal as measured when shot, was 3 feet 4 inches, with a girth of 2 feet 8 inches. The length of the diminutive tail was $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. The eyes were brown in colour.

In view of the variation in colour recorded for species of wombats the differences between *gillespiei* and *latifrons* are not very significant.

The two skins, male and female, received by De Vis from Bullamon Station, on the Moonie River, show that the *gillespiei* form was very variable. The cranial distinctions noted by De Vis such as the development of the lachrymal protuberance and of the nasal spine are not very distinctive characters in this group. Although Owen laid some stress on the direction of the sutures between the frontals and nasals, there is evidently much individual variation in this character. De Vis' species is more reasonably designated to-day as a sub-species—*Lasiiorhinus latifrons gillespiei*.

General notes.—Mr. Charles Barnard reports that there were many burrows in the district, but very few tracks of the animals were seen. The Station hands said that the wombats had never been seen far from the burrows, which are in sandy ridges in fairly-well timbered country, but carrying very poor grass. They said that the wombats came out to lie on top of the burrows on very hot days and that they also came out on rainy days. Mr. Barnard notes: "We could see no trace of their feeding out anywhere. They made light pads running from one burrow to another. The burrows were generally not more than one hundred yards apart and were mostly in groups of three or four."

Only three animals were seen, one of which was shot. As suggested by Messrs. Barnard, it is probable that these wombats were much more numerous in earlier



years, but successive periods of drought have brought them to the verge of extinction. It was considered that these wombats obtained most of the food underground. Although they may be partly rhizophagous, the examination of stomach contents of the specimen shot (thoughtfully preserved by Messrs. Barnard) shows that this particular animal had been feeding on "the above ground parts of plants." We are indebted to Dr. D. A. Herbert for examination of this material, which consists largely of fragments of stems and leaves, including awns of the Comet River Grass, *Perotis rara*.

It is of interest here to record that Mr. Griffiths of the Monkland School, Gympie, informed me that about twenty years ago (from August, 1937) he saw wombats "distinctly" in the Tambo district.

The Common Wombat, *P. mitchelli*, extends into the southern portion of Queensland in the Stanthorpe district, from whence several specimens have been obtained in recent years. Iredale and Troughton (1934, p. 34), following Mathews and Iredale (1912, p. 14),⁹ designate this species as Perry's *hirsutum*, but it seems more probable that the wombat illustrated by Perry and named *Opossum hirsutum* came from a Bass Strait island and should be kept in the synonymy of *ursinus*.

⁹ Mathews and Iredale, Vict. Naturalist, Vol. XXIX, 1912.